

PRESS RELEASE

H.E.R.O.S. gives rise to rapid-response EMS helicopter service

In February, a group of concerned Prince George residents met to discuss how to bring a dedicated air ambulance helicopter service to the city.

The need for this service was highlighted in a series of articles published in January by the Prince George Citizen, which stemmed from conversations Citizen reporter Ted Clarke had with Hans Dysarsz of Delta, a former fixed-wing pilot who helped establish the Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society (STARS) in Calgary in 1985.

“Hans made me aware there was a critical need and Prince George deserved to have its own version of STARS,” said Clarke. “We wanted to make a difference that would impact everyone’s lives.”

Now, 10 months later, that group, the Northern B.C. Helicopter Emergency Rescue Operations Society (H.E.R.O.S.) is ready to announce its intention to fill that need. What we are proposing is a not-for-profit public-private partnership unique to this province for the people of north central B.C. Our H.E.R.O.S. emergency service will save lives and reduce long-term disabilities by preventing time delays in transporting critically sick or injured people to the appropriate hospital facilities.

Accidents happen, people get sick, and when their conditions become life-threatening, time is a killer, and every second counts. Our doctor-led rapid-response EMS helicopter will significantly reduce the time it takes for medical help to arrive.

H.E.R.O.S. president and chair, Brent Marshall, owner of the Northland Auto Group, whose charitable donations as a healthcare philanthropist in Prince George have exceeded \$2 million, says the people of Prince George and the surrounding communities deserve an emergency medical helicopter capable of reaching patients for air rescues in any location.

“I am so excited to bring this life-saving service to the people of northern B.C.,” said Marshall, a former search and rescue volunteer firefighter.

“I hope that within less than two years we have a state-of-the-art helicopter air ambulance that can fly day or night in most weather conditions. I'd like to see helipads in all outlying communities, including a helipad as close as possible to University Hospital of Northern B.C., working in partnership with the BC Ambulance Service, Northern Health, and the medical community to provide the best possible care to sick and injured people in northern B.C. It will benefit all of the people in the North.”

Directing H.E.R.O.S. operations as interim executive director is Steve Flynn, a native of Prince George who has worked extensively with helicopters as a pilot. He was the founder and owner of Blackcomb Helicopters, the largest supplier of casual-hire helicopter medical evacuation services to BC Emergency Health Services during his tenure.

Flynn is well qualified to lead H.E.R.O.S. In 2008 he was presented a Governor-General’s Award for Bravery, along with two other men, for their helicopter rescue of a hypothermic ice sailor who broke through the ice on Green Lake near Whistler.

“Never in my 28-year career in aviation have I felt that my contributions could have such an impact to help save lives and improve the quality of lives as they do with H.E.R.O.S.,” said Flynn. “It is truly an

honour to be involved in the development of such an important organization that has only one mission, saving lives.”

With the ability to bring the hospital to the patient by flying a team of advanced life paramedics, nurses, and if needed, an experienced emergency doctor, the time for definitive medical care to arrive is significantly reduced. H.E.R.O.S. medical director Yvon Makadiama, an emergency physician at UHNBC, says there is no doubt, H.E.R.O.S. will vastly improve pre-hospital care for the people of northern B.C.

“In any given medical emergency, an ambulance is essential and you must have solid skills in the assessment and treatment of a seriously ill or injured patient,” said Makadiama. “Quick and clear decisions become critical to deter death, and a doctor will be able to perform life-saving procedures before the patient reaches the hospital.”

He said H.E.R.O.S. will also provide opportunities for training rural medical staff and will engage in injury prevention strategies in the community.

H.E.R.O.S. will work together with the provincial government, federal and municipal governments, the BC Ambulance Service, Northern Health Authority, police and fire rescue services, search and rescue organizations, First Nations health agencies and industry stakeholders in the north. Together, we intend to develop an EMS helicopter service that will be on par with the best in the world.

We estimate we will need \$5.5 million in the first year to become operational. We are asking the provincial and federal governments to provide, at most, half that amount. Because we will be serving the people of aboriginal communities in north central B.C., we hope to partner with the First Nations Health Authority, a new entity which will be funded by the federal government starting in October 2013.

Unlike existing B.C. air ambulance services in Richmond, Kamloops and Prince Rupert, all of which are operated by for-profit air service providers, our non-profit society will provide unequalled value to governments and the people who deserve this service. We will accomplish that through fundraising efforts with corporations, local businesses and community-minded individuals who understand why this service is so desperately needed. There will also be many opportunities for volunteers in all of the communities we serve to spearhead local projects to build and maintain helipads and participate in H.E.R.O.S. fundraisers that will enhance our helicopter service.

When we have sufficient funding in place, we expect to fly our first mission sometime late in 2013 or early in 2014. The sooner the better, BECAUSE EVERY SECOND COUNTS.

For more information about Northern BC H.E.R.O.S., go to www.nbcheros.org.

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